

they are derived. We may add, that all the rest are owing to ourselves. As I doubt not you agree in these three remarks, I will at once say, there is then established a triple responsibility, and it shows that a regard of duty is as necessary in the study of art as in anything human else. There is a discipline for the best of peace as well as of war. Let not the soldier neglect to polish his arms—let him not sleep on his post, save he would die; let not the man of art—the soldier of peace—forget to brighten and keep bright the weapons of his mind: let him not waste his time, save he would virtually die—become civilly extinct—as a cipher. There is then a duty for both. A sense of this duty is the crown to all our attainments, and let me deliberately say that without it they are worthless—they are the powers of the fallen Son of the Morning—consummate, but for ruin!

#### "NATURE ALL DECEPTION."

SEN.—In case it should escape the notice of other men, or be deemed beneath their notice, cannot let pass, without some effort to expose its fallacy, the blasphemous comparison which I know not what milder term to use, by which, in a paper on "Decoration," which you lately reported, it was attempted to justify our so-called "decoration" that consists in making cheap materials counterfeit costly ones. The argument (if any be meant) is this:—

1. The heavens, which pretend to be a dome, are only a sham dome.
2. The rainbow pretends to be an arch, but only a sham arch.
3. *Ergo*, "all nature is deception."
4. And hence, it is proper, in human architecture, sometimes (whenever we cannot afford rich materials as our neighbours, or as rich as we wish to be thought), to use counterfeits. Reserve the superiority of art which only sometimes deceives, to nature which always does so.

Now, without examining the logic of these arguments (which I fear would not satisfy Mill), I propose that if the two premises be disproven, the whole fabric founded on them may be left to its fate.

"The concavity of heaven, the rainbow itself, are a deception." A deception (according to Johnson) is a deceiving, and to deceive is "to beguile, delude, mislead, or lead into error." Now, then, grant that a child or a savage, viewing the heavens, is misled, and led into the error that he sees a clumsy, meaningless *hemisphère de four*. What misleads him? The sky, or his own poor gross and grovelling mind, that cannot travel beyond its little circle of homely commonplaces? Again, grant that a fool, with a mind enlarged by the stored experience of ages, and the arts of a civilised empire, is still misled, though less misled; and he sees in the same spectacle an apparatus of "crystalline spheres," dome enclosing dome, with all manner of eccentric motions, and driven by the most simple and refined machinery the then state of human art and science could image. What deceives him? The celestial appearances, or his own narrow, clumsy, clockmaker's-shop ideas of motion? And so with every successive step towards seeing the appearance aright. Copernicus, with a mighty enlargement, reduces the all-important earth from spectator and audience, to a subordinate actor and appendage. Newton sweeps away the cumbrous mechanical mechanism of domes and wheels: a further stretch of mind realises that this whole system is but a speck, one star: another realises that Newton's universe and its million systems to a handful of the dust of the galaxy: and this galaxy to be one of a thousand: the universe of yesterday becomes a speck in that of to-day, and the universe of to-day a mote in that of to-morrow: the appearance (it is the notion man's littleness can approach) approaching continually nearer the truth, that must ever transcend infinitely his grasp, and therefore be ever (according to Mr. Ballantine) "a deception." As well might an infant call anything he cannot understand to his elders, or a savage, anything he

cannot understand in civilised life, "a deception." Nature's appearances deceive us not: it is we who deceive ourselves.

There is no such thing as a deception or false appearance in all nature—every natural appearance is true, for it follows invariable laws (known to be more general than any others are known to be, even those of *gratulation itself*), and without such laws vision would be useless, not able to convey or telegraph to us external truths. The appearances, I say, are all true; and the simple proof is, that they do eventually reveal to us the truest notions of each thing that our minds are capable of receiving. The truth is always discovered by the appearances, not in spite of them. I will go further and assert that, either no other appearances could give us notions so true, or no others could do it so soon or so easily to us. Whoever denies this, the onus lies with him to show how the laws of optics could be improved, and what appearances anything (the heavens, for instance) could wear, that should give to any class of minds a truer idea of the reality, or as true an idea with less trouble. Till this has been shown, no appearance in nature can be called false or deceptive: it is solely the spectator's ignorant, hasty, and false theory which is deceptive; for the mere optical appearance of the sky, or any other natural object, conveys no idea, true or false: the idea is formed by memory and comparison, and other mental processes. What the thing shall seem to be depends not on itself, but on the spectator's mind; and whatever he takes it for, that is not its appearance, but his theory of it. It is not the object that looks falsely, but I that see it falsely.

I can only now think of one parallel to this in architecture. It is that which Mr. Ruskin calls "a difficult case of conscience," viz. whether the Gothic vault-ribs be right, in leaving uncorrected that idea of *flexure* and elasticity which the ignorant falsely receive from them (and which was the foundation of Warburton's once famous theory). This is plainly no fault of theirs, but of a rash and partial generalization by which the spectator deceives himself. It disappears as he forms truer notions of the Gothic system, and is therefore no more a deception than the mistakes we make in viewing nature.

But what analogy have these to the deceptions that Mr. Ballantine admires? If I mistake a rainbow for a tangible object, the fault is in my poverty and grovellingness of mind, not the rainbow's want of clumsiness and grossness; but if I mistake a painted fir door for one of rosewood, or a starred ceiling by night for the sky (not very comfortable) where's the falsehood now? In my want of sharpness, or the owner's want of honesty and his miserable substitutes for invention?

There is another slight difference between the "deceptions" of nature, and those which, in Snobland, are considered art. Everything in nature is better and richer than it appears (or rather than we see it). The heavens indeed, are not the savage's dome of sapphire; but what then are they less? No; infinitely vaster, grander, richer, and more elaborate. The rainbow is neither the solid arch that the child sees it, nor the coloured vapour that the savage sees it, nor the phantasmagorical image on a screen of cloud that civilised men still see it; but more fine, artificial, superficial, delicate, and wonderful than even the most cultured philosopher sees it. And this is to warrant the making things appear something more than they are!!!

The school to which Mr. Ballantine belongs, is, I am aware, so flourishing in this island, and so much more so here than anywhere else, that it has the best right to the name of "British School." Its fundamental doctrine is, that everything should appear at first more and richer than it is. But everything in true art is more and richer than it at first appears; and everything in nature, more and richer than it ever appears. These I will maintain to be general differences distinguishing the three things,—false art, true art, nature.

As for the other reasons (if such they can be called) put forth in the same paper to support the same fallacy, they are so very pitiful,

that they must surely be its last legs, or nearly the last. If an art is to be esteemed because it has "almost arrived at perfection in this country," pocket-picking has especial claims to our notice. All people too (except architects) now know that if the usage of "250 years" is to sanction any thing, there is neither right nor wrong in the world. The calling in such aids as these, therefore, to any cause, only betrays its weakness. But this is especially the case with the present. Mr. Ballantine can trace back the history of these paltry substitutes for art, for 250 years, to the "time of James VI." Very well. Now every artist knows that from 300 to 250 years ago, exactly, a great and most important change was passing over our national tastes, and was completed on the accession of that same James; a change which (though inevitable, and even the best that could be devised at the time) is now, by all parties, without exception, deplored, either by itself, or as a step in a continued downward progress. This was the change from an effete, but still real style of art, to a sham one—from a degree of truth just above zero, to one just below it. To assert, therefore, of any artistic practice, that it has been used in this country just 250 years and no more, is at present, to all parties, one of the best arguments against it that could be found.

But for Mr. Ballantine's "250 years ago," I will, out of sheer pity, give him 2,000; and grant him that his graining and marbling was practised all that time ago in Egypt, and 1,500 years ago in Rome; and probably, in some place or other, at every period since. The question is, "were they ever used except in a declining state of civilisation—a retrogressive, materialising, animalising state of humanity, or of some branch thereof?" The test I will propose is this—were they ever used in a society where the gods were honoured with more art than the public, and the public with more than individuals?

The only remaining argument is, that there was "something gained, he held, in making a common fir door resemble some rare and beautiful wood so closely as not to be discovered without minute inspection, as a homely material, destitute of all beauty, had, at little cost, been converted into an object of admiration." The material is "destitute of all beauty;" so is that of the finest statue, picture, or cathedral. What is not done with the material of these cannot be needed with the material of the door. It is for the artist to beautify objects, not materials; and if the door be "destitute of all beauty," its designer is no artist. But, by beautifying the material instead of the door, you say that he (or rather the grainer for him) makes it "so object of admiration." Admiration? By whom? Who ever admired the graining of Lord Snobkin's door? Or if any body did, where would he be thought to have come from, but out of a painter's shop? The crowning absurdity of these things (as of a thousand other of our so-called "refinements" and "luxuries" and civilised "wants") is, that they are *never admired by any one*—are never thought of after being once done and paid for,—never (as Mr. Ruskin says) fix an eye except passively. They have no more connexion with beauty or ornament than the stamps on a "German silver" spoon. They are merely examples of that infamously paltry wealth-mimicry peculiar to Snobland, that makes her world's laughing-stock (or will do so this summer)—that "ornamentation" which, if gold were of the colour of rust, and this colour imitable, and iron the colour of gold, would gild it as much as ever. This so-called "art," which is as natural to us as the air we breathe, is peculiar to the "nation of shopkeepers"—to the great corrupters of the world's taste, and the lands within the immediate circle of her baneful influence. Turks, Chinamen, savages—all would laugh it to scorn. I have had no opportunity of asking any friend who has been in the East, but nevertheless will venture to assert (and I hope any of your readers will correct me if wrong) that Mussulman architecture and decoration, the poor, degenerate descendants of the fairy arts of Granada, effete and dotard